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RECENT TRANSLATIONS OF BUDDHIST WRITINGS¹

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PHILADELPHIA

In these volumes, Mrs. Rhys Davids has added to the debt which all students of Buddhist literature are under to herself and her husband. The two volumes of *Psalms* are canonical, while the *Compendium of Philosophy* is an interesting and esteemed epitome of that third section of the Buddhist canon, the Abhidharma, about which the sects differed so much.

As the present reviewer is not qualified to deal with a metaphysical work, especially one that is edited by a professional philosopher, he will dispose of this first. In her preface the editor says: "It is my conviction that if the way in which the tradition of the Theravādins—it is often called Southern Buddhism—has philosophized, and still philosophizes, on these fundamental questions, could be adequately expounded so as to be intelligible to Western philosophy, tendencies in the former might become apparent which were not a little sympathetic with much in certain notable departures now showing themselves in France, America, and England."

As metaphysicians, both the Burmese translator and his English editor spare no pains in discussing the best equivalent in our tongue for Pali technical terms. Thus,

¹*Psalms of the Brethren* (Thera-Gāthā). Translated from the Pali by Mrs. Rhys Davids. London, 1913.

Psalms of the Sisters (Therī-Gāthā). Translated from the Pali by Mrs. Rhys Davids. London, 1909.

Compendium of Philosophy. Translated from the Pali of the Abhidhammattha-Sangaha, by Shwe Zan Aung, B.A. Edited by Mrs. Rhys Davids. London, 1910.

(All three published by the Pali Text Society.)

an editorial note informs us: "*Itthattam* is exactly the 'this thusness' of Artemus Ward, and it is regrettable that so good a word should as yet be outside the pale of serious English." But it is just such scholars as Mrs. Rhys Davids who finally succeed in re-establishing such words. A Japanese scholar, in 1900, already set the example with "suchness," and there is no reason why "thusness" also should not become a respectable philosophical term.

Both translator and editor freely discuss the terms used by Kant and other Europeans, and the fitness or unfitness of such words to represent similar terms in Pali. Thus the editor observes: "I have spent many hours over *javana*, and am content to throw 'apperception' overboard for a better term, or for *javana*, untranslated and as easy to pronounce as our own 'javelin.' It suffices to remember that it is the mental aspect or parallel of that moment in nerve-process, when central function is about to become efferent activity or 'innervation.' Teachers in Ceylon associate it with the word 'dynamic.' And its dominant interest for European psychologists is *the fusion of intellect and will in Buddhist psychology*, to which I adverted under *cetanā*."

Italics ours, with the hope that such a sentence will whet the appetite of the psychologist for more.

Now for the *Psalms*. These books are most important, for they contain not only ancient poetry but stories. In the Pali canon they are placed in the Fifth, or Short, Collection of Sūtras, originally an appendix of utterances by disciples, but in its present form containing very ancient utterances ascribed to Buddha. This Collection, like the Abhidharma, was another section of the canon, about which the sects differed. Thus the pre-Christian sect of the Dharmaguptas, whose recension of the canon has been lost in the Hindu, but partially preserved in Chinese translations of fifteen hundred years

ago, had a book in this Fifth Collection called *Verses of the Elect* (*Ārya-Gāthā*). As the sect also mentions other poetical books agreeing in titles with those of the Pali recension of the canon (which belongs to the sect of the Elders), it is reasonable to suppose that these Elect Ones' verses were our present *Psalms of the Brethren* and probably also those of the *Sisters*. And in Catholic Buddhism we cannot consider a book fully canonical unless it have been transmitted by more than one sect. Even those thus transmitted betray unmistakable traces of sectarian manipulation. Thus the great Middling Collection (so named, not from its position in the canon, which varied, but from the medium length of its dialogues) contains in the Pali a hundred and fifty-two discourses, but two hundred and twenty-two in the Chinese of another sect, whose Hindu original has been lost. We can only be certain of the genuineness of those discourses wherein both recensions agree (including some found in the Numerical Collection, between which and the Middling there was a constant interchange). Until therefore we can be certain that the Elect Stanzas of the Dharmaguptas were our present *Psalms*, or until we find these in another sectarian canon, we must suspend our judgment. Of course we can fall back upon higher criticism, and argue from language, style, ancient quotations, and the like, that the *Psalms* are very early; but they cannot have the same standing as the Sutras of the Four Collections common to the two sectarian recensions in Pali and Chinese. Higher criticism has already pointed out that the *Psalms* have been added to, and that the Brethren who uttered them lived over a period of two or three centuries at least, from the lifetime of Buddha, 500 B.C., to the age of Asoka, 250 B.C. If we had a Chinese version before us, as we have of a companion book in the Short Collection, the Logia-Book, we could then, as in this case, bring in the lower criticism in con-

firmation. For in the two recensions the Logia-Book differs, as does the Middling Collection.

To the exhaustive study by Professor Anesaki, now at Harvard University, we owe the knowledge of these fundamental facts about Buddhist criticism. Before that we were free to imagine that the canon of the Elders in Pali was the only one that ever was, though the catalogue of the Chinese Tripitaka published by Nanjio in 1883 had already shown us a different recension of the Long Collection and even of the Middling.

We know from the Book of Discipline that it was a habit of the early Buddhists, as of other Orientals, to summarize their doctrines in pithy verses. These verses have a concentrated quality and often a superb music, both of which defy translation. Mrs. Rhys Davids has chosen blank verse as her medium, but sometimes employs hexameters. While the present reviewer prefers rhythmical prose, arranged in lines, like the Revised Version of Job and the Psalms, yet he is so thankful to get another solid fraction of the immortal books in English that he will not press so small a point. The difference between the one kind of rendering and the other, as also the difficulty of translating metaphysical terms, may be seen in the following verses which are found also in the *Hymns of the Faith* (*Dhammapada*). The two sets of verses are identical in the Pali:

*Psalms of the Brethren.*²

676. When he by wisdom doth discern and see:
 "IMPERMANENT IS EVERYTHING IN LIFE,"
 Then he at all this suffering feels disgust.
 Lo! herein lies the way to purity.
677. When he by wisdom doth discern and see,
 That "EVERYTHING IN LIFE IS BOUND TO ILL,"
 Then he at all this suffering feels disgust.
 Lo! herein lies the way to purity.

² London, 1913.

678. When he by wisdom doth discern and see,
That "EVERYTHING IN LIFE IS VOID OF SOUL,"
Then he at all this suffering feels disgust.
Lo! herein lies the way to purity.

Hymns of the Faith.³

277. Impermanent all compounds of existence!
When this one knows and sees,
Then he becomes averse to pain:
This is the way of purity.
278. Painful are all the compounds of existence!
When this one knows and sees,
Then he becomes averse to pain:
This is the way of purity.
279. Impersonal all mental states!
When this one knows and sees,
Then he becomes averse to pain:
This is the way of purity.

The stories that accompany the poems were compiled by a commentator of the fifth century who lived at Conjevaram, in the south of India, a town to be made famous long afterwards by a forgotten battle of the American Revolution. Now, owing to the late date of the commentator, the stories are reckoned uncanonical. But this regards only their present form. The commentator expressly says that he built upon older commentaries now lost, as well as on the Dhammapada commentary, still extant.⁴ The practice of writing stories to illustrate the pithy Sūtras and verses of the early Buddhists was itself early. *And when one of these commentaries was made in primitive times, it was canonized.* This was the case with the explanatory stories to the verses of the *Book of Enunciations*, another poetical section of the Fifth Collection. A story, therefore, in that famous book is canonical, whereas a precisely similar story in the com-

³ Chicago, 1902.

⁴ Brethren, pp. 180, 266, and xxiv.

mentary upon our Psalms is uncanonical. This fact seems to have escaped our learned translator.⁵ Thus she calls the story of the Twin Miracle "post-canonical." According to this legend, Buddha sent fire and water from his person to confound unbelievers.⁶ Now that this Twin Miracle story was once part of the canonical interpretative legends is not only clear from the methods of higher criticism, arguing from Pali works alone, but has lately been demonstrated by the surer facts of lower criticism. For the profound researches of Sylvain Lévi into Catholic Buddhism have proven that the text of the story in the Sanskrit of the *Book of Legends* (*Divyâvadāna*) is the canonical text of the Book of Discipline of the sect of the Realists. The Chinese version of the latter proves it. Mrs. Rhys Davids makes a similar slip (page 415) when she calls the Buddhist analogue to the Wandering Jew a "Chinese Buddhist legend." It is a Hindu Buddhist legend, occurring in the same *Book of Legends*, and reappearing in the canonical Chinese of the Classified Collection, translated from a lost Sanskrit original, fragments of which have been found in Central Asia. As to the Twin Miracle, that story, with others from the Pali Canon, was graven upon the Great Tope in Ceylon in the second century before Christ. We cannot therefore make a clean sweep of everything as uncanonical because it no longer stands in the extant recension of the canon of the Elders transmitted in Pali.

Apart from these fascinating literary questions, the Buddhist *Psalms* have a still more fascinating human interest. One of the things that strikes a Christian is the prevalence of sudden conversion. Mrs. Rhys Davids leaves the word *aññā* untranslated, though she calls it "gnosis, or intuitive enlightenment, constituting the

⁵ Psalms of the Brethren, p. 36, note.

⁶ See Buddhist Texts in John, John 7 38; 12 34.

guarantee of Arahantship.”⁷ “Sudden conversion” would not be a bad translation. Every student of the Pitakas knows the phenomenon. Thus in our present *Psalms of the Brethren* (page 175), a monk sees a pretty dancing-girl in the main street of his town, and the sight, by reaction, kindles the Buddhist reflection that *all is fleeting*. Instantly he realizes his sudden conversion, and testifies thereto in a psalm.

In her introduction Mrs. Rhys Davids draws a charming picture of child converts. They are all ordained at the age of seven, and their artless verses are sufficiently childish to represent the little fellows, even if these did not compose them themselves. The reviewer, for one, is pious enough to believe that they did.

Very instructive too are the editorial statistics of external and internal experience. Among the *Psalms of the Monks*, 141 out of 264 relate to internal experiences, whereas among those of the *Nuns*, 42 out of 73 relate to external experiences. It is fortunate that a psychologist and a woman was at hand to tell us this. Very external, indeed, were some of the Sisters’ experiences, as when a nun was persistently tempted by a libertine and plucked out her eye. “There!” she exclaimed, “take your eye,” and gave it to him. One cannot help being haunted by the suspicion that this story became as famous as other Buddhist legends which we now know to have been translated into the vernaculars of the Parthian Empire, the buffer state between Palestine and India. Why should not the story have been familiar to him who said: “If thine eye cause thee to offend, pluck it out!”

In the *Psalms of the Sisters* we meet with converted harlots (pages 52, 121). One is the famous Ambapāli of the Sūtras.

The commentary on the Monkish *Hymns* tells us that one brother “dwelt in the infirmary” (page 78). We need

⁷ So Mrs. Rhys Davids and her husband now write this word.

not be sceptical about this and cry, "Oh, fifth century!" for Asoka in the third century before Christ established hospitals for men and animals under the immediate inspiration of Buddhism. Anesaki has told us that in Japan a hospital and an asylum were attached to a temple in 593 A.D., soon after the great religion was introduced into that land.

So too in the matter of writing. A monk, says the commentary (page 107), wrote to a distant friend "on the excellence of the Buddha, and sent him a copy of the system." The Ceylon Chronicles relate that the Pali canon was first committed to writing in Ceylon in the first century B.C., but Chinese sources inform us that it was already in writing in continental India.

On page 172 there is some typical eschatology. A monk sums up his past existences: He has been in hell, of course, and often in the Preta-world, where they are all so hungry, with very big bellies and very little mouths; oft has he transmigrated into beasts, mighty glad to be born at last a man! Occasionally he went to heaven. But now the long drear round of births lies before his converted vision, and he sickens of the whole business, heaven and all! It is void of true worth,

"Born of preceding conditions, unstable and constantly drifting."

And so he comes unto the final Peace.

This summary of Buddhist eschatology is echoed in a famous verse of the *Hymns of the Faith*:

126. Some to a womb are born again;
Wrong-doers unto hell;
To Paradise the pious go;
The sinless to Nirvana.

The reviewer has pointed out elsewhere that the verb *parinibbāti*, in the last line, can only mean an eschatological Nirvana. True, as Rhys Davids and his wife have often observed, the word also means "to be at

peace, to enter into rest," etc., and is frequently used of Nirvana here and now. But it also means what it does in this authoritative Dhammapada verse. In an apparently exhaustive note on the word, in his *Dialogues of the Buddha*, ii, 132, Rhys Davids quotes another verse from the same Hymns, but unfortunately omits the one here given, which exhibits the eschatological connotation. His wife (page 283) translates the word "wholly pass away," but says in a note (page 417) that it "need not necessarily refer to the *death* of the righteous." She then goes on to quote an explanation from the commentary, but overlooks the fact that the explanation is a pointed quotation of a famous passage in the Logia-Book which declares that there are two kinds of Nirvana: first, wherein one still feels pleasure and pain; second, where one's feelings have become cold.

Now these states are important in this life, but the Nirvana thus attained derives its supreme importance in Hindu eyes from the fact that it is a guarantee against further transmigration. Indeed, on the first page of the Buddhist Logia-Book, the Buddha himself declares, "I am your guarantee that you shall not transmigrate!"

In order to secure both the present and the eschatological connotations of *parinibbāti* therefore, we must neither say "is at peace" nor "passes away," but simply "attains or enters Nirvana." Mrs. Rhys Davids very aptly renders the past participle *nibbuto*, "extinct," by "dwells in Nirvana."⁸ The exact words are:

"Cool and serene, I in Nibbana dwell," where the Pali form for Nirvana is used instead of the now naturalized English word. It is therefore appropriate to say "enters Nirvana" in such passages as those which so often recur.

The propriety of this rendering is still further manifest from the fact that there is a little pious snobbery about the word. Like other Orientals, the Hindus are very

⁸ Psalms of the Sisters, p. 130.

particular not to use the same verb for the death of a man as for that of a beast, nor the same word for the death of a Buddha as for that of an ordinary man. A beast is "dead," a man has "finished his time," while an Arahāt or a Buddha has "entered Nirvāṇa." It is well understood that he can enter it here and now. *Parinibbuto* is also used of a horse in the Middling Collection, in the sense of quieted, pacified by the horse-breaker. But, if that pacified horse had died, no sacred writer would ever use the lofty verb *parinibbāti*. Only those whose germs of renewed existence are extinct can die like this, which is only possible after the human form has been attained. Thus then is *parinibbāti* simply the most aristocratic of all the verbs "to die." The nicety of Hindu usage was recently pointed out by Dr. Eugene Watson Burlingame, in his Pali class at the University of Pennsylvania. "*Viharanto*," said he, "does not mean 'dwelling'; it could never be used of an animal. It means that the monk was *in residence*, as we say of a Christian Canon. Many of these Pali terms are highly technical." As to the verb *parinibbāti*, it is not a subtlety of philology that is at stake, but the treatment by a great religion of the life after death. Why should we allow a nineteenth-century agnosticism to color our translations? Why should we shrink from admitting that the early Buddhists believed in a future life? Their whole thoughts were centred in a future life or lives; their whole religion was a scheme to escape the consequences of such. One hears people say: "Buddhism has no god and no soul!" The statement is very misleading. By turns the Buddha and his Dharma were the gods. True, they had not created crocodiles and sharks and pronounced them very good; that business had been done by sterner forces than the Supreme Ideal, which is God. As to the soul, the Buddhists metaphysically deny it, but practically affirm it. Five hundred

Jātaka stories end: "The hero was I myself." The non-ego doctrine of Buddhism has a Christian counterpart in Swedenborg's statement that the Lord is the only man, that the exterior sight is merely the window for a more interior one, and that in the last analysis, it is the Lord alone who sees. Both Swedenborg and Myers—two names which will go sailing down the centuries when a thousand lesser ones that fill our mouths today are forgotten—both these supreme geniuses agree that as the spirit ascends, the egoism falls off; a whole society appears as a single angel, says Swedenborg. Orthodox Christianity ties us up so terribly in its narrow heaven of Tom Smiths spun out to eternity that we need these daring rebels to unite us with the thoughts of the other side of the planet, where the Buddha declared the bliss of personal life in the highest heaven to become finally tedious; man cannot live forever this separate truncated existence.

Nor is Nirvana nothingness. It is only nothingness for anger, lust, and folly. It is the larger life whereinto we may enter and abide right here. But to enter it here is so rare that the phrase is generally retained for the death of an Arahāt. A few generations after Buddha arahatship ceased. (Here we have the Savior idea.) The Beloved Disciple was backward in his development, and was refused admittance to the First Council of the Order after Buddha's Nirvana. But he suddenly attained it and was admitted. This had already been predicted by the Master, who had said, "Even in this present life will Ananda enter Nirvana"—our verb again. To translate "In this present life will Ananda find peace," would miss the point. It is the peace of Nirvana, which for most of us belongs to a far future state, that Ananda was to attain even here.

On page 10 we have an account of Dabbo the Mallian (a race of wrestlers). His psalm (page 11) is a single

stanza, and he too is "perfected" (*parinibbuto*, again). This Dabbo was so spiritual that, according to the canonical commentary on the *Book of Enunciations*, he entered Nirvana by fire. Like Elijah, he ascended into the air, but unlike him he fixed his mind upon the idea of flame, and meditated thereupon so intensely that his body took fire, and he passed away before the astonished monks, so that "neither ashes nor soot remained"! And so did he finally enter Nirvana.

Noteworthy renderings by Mrs. Rhys Davids are "superman" for *Mahāpuriso* (page 311), and "silent Buddha" for *Paccekebuddho* (page 58). This is much better than Warren's "private Buddha," which somehow provokes risibility. "Gospel," for *Saddhammo*,⁹ is also very satisfactory. But we cannot congratulate the translator on her rendition of *Dhammo* by "norm." It is doubtless good metaphysics, but rather grates upon one in poetry. To those of us who have been reading her husband's translations since the '70's, "doctrine" is good enough still for this untranslatable word. On page 71 of the *Psalms of the Sisters* there is a rather serious mistranslation where *mā cintayī* is rendered "Think not," instead of "Be not disturbed." Buddha is telling a famous nun that she has come into the presence of the only one who can be her refuge, but the present translation reverses the meaning. Little slips like the following indicate how the forms of the first and second persons of verbs are passing away in English (especially the second person):

"Sooth am I one who *doth* not seek to be."¹⁰

So, too:¹¹

"Dhīrā, brave Sister! who *hath* valiantly
Thy faculties in noblest culture trained."

We must not omit the allusion to baptism (page 197), where a disciple tells how that, before he became a

⁹ *Psalms of the Sisters*, p. 85.

¹⁰ P. 110.

¹¹ *Sisters*, p. 14.

Buddhist, he bathed three times a day to wash away his sins, but now he has found a higher Baptism:

“For I have plunged into the Eightfold Stream.”

An oft-repeated formula of conversion is, “Then was my heart set free”; or, to use the exact metre of the Pali: “Straightway my heart her freedom found.”

A good example of the conciseness of the Pali compared with the diffuseness of the English is the line,¹²

“Him saw I sitting there, Light of the World.”

In the original this line consists of two words, or at the most three, for the second is a compound:

“*Disvāna lokapajjotam*”:

“Having-seen world-lamp.”

On page 336 is a poetical rendering of a famous prediction of Buddha's about the last times of the church. Indeed, it is one of the scriptural selections fixed upon by imperial authority, 250 B.C., and graven on the rock at Bhābrā. This prophecy was first translated into English in *The Open Court* for 1902, and reprinted in Asia, America, and Europe, in a well-known work.

On page 251 we read, in the Brethren commentary, of a Greek Elder named “Truth-guarded the Great.” He lived in the third century B.C., and converted one of the princes. According to the Great Chronicle of Ceylon he also converted the Panjāb, while an Elder with a similar name converted the Bactrian Greeks. Another account adds that he converted them by means of a scripture (still extant) on the Buddha's omniscience. Let us hope that Truth-guarded translated it into Greek, and that Aurel Stein will dig it up in Afghanistan. It would help us to understand so much! Certain it is that so early as B.C. 2 the Buddhist Sūtras were trans-

¹²Sisters, p. 85.

lated into a vernacular.¹³ This vernacular was not Chinese, for the Annals declare that the religion, though known in China then, was not believed in. Moreover, the vernacular translation was presented to a Chinese official by an ambassador from the great Yue-chi, that people whose coins have come down to us with Greek on one side and Pali on the other. Was the vernacular Greek itself? Probably not. More likely it was Tokharish or Sogdian, known to have been used by that people. Specimens of Buddhist books in both these tongues have been found in Central Asia. And both were current in portions of the great Parthian empire. Such being the case, we need not be astonished if Luke and John had heard of two towering characters in these *Psalms of the Monks*, viz., the Penitent Thief and the Beloved Disciple. Yes, here they both are, as large as life. Indeed, their absence would raise doubts as to the antiquity and genuineness of the Psalms, so prominent are these characters in the oldest books and sculptures. Quite the reverse would be the case with the Gospels. Were we to find a recension of Luke without the Penitent Thief, we should say at once, "That looks like an earlier edition." And why? Because Luke has to do violence to the text of his master Mark to get the story into the Gospel at all. Compare the synoptic narratives:

MARK	MATTHEW	LUKE
And they that were crucified with him reproached him. (15 32)	And the robbers also that were crucified with him cast upon him the same reproach. (27 44)	And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him. . . . But the other answered and rebuking him said. . . . (23 39-40).

¹³ The Wei Annals of China, according to Franke, in *The Indian Antiquary*, 1906.

Why is Luke so anxious to introduce this character at variance with the older tradition? The answer is that the Antiochene physician was a student of religion, and in the Syrian metropolis, which was the terminus of the Chinese silk-trade, he had seen Kanishka's coins, which even now are found from India to Sweden. Upon these coins he had seen the name of Buddha in Greek letters: ΒΟΔΔΟ.

He had inquired who this Buddha was, and had found that he was the founder of a missionary religion of love and forgiveness, whose Scriptures were being translated into Sogdian and Tokharish, two vernaculars of the neighboring Parthian empire. Scenes from these Scriptures were being carved on temple gates in that empire, which ancient geography shows us was studded with a long line of hotels from Luke's own city to the Hindu frontier. He could not escape this knowledge in that great international metropolis. As a poet and an evangelist, he made it his business to adapt the new Christian religion to the Gentile world. The Fathers of the Church are unanimous about this, as we all know. Now among the sculptured figures which he had probably seen himself in his travels as a student of medicine to one of the greatest seats of ancient medical learning, India, were the Beloved Disciple and the Penitent Thief. Even if Luke had not seen them himself, he could easily have heard of them.

That the author of the Fourth Gospel should have introduced, under similar influence, a Beloved Disciple where the Synoptists know of none, I will not assert; he may have been influenced by other motives. Still it is suspicious. But in the case of Luke I feel considerable confidence.

The Buddhist story of the Penitent Thief first appeared in English from the Pali of the Middling Collection in *The Open Court* for October, 1900. Since then it has

been reprinted with Chinese notes by Professor Anesaki, and lately translated into Italian. A better translation than this pioneer one has now been made by Doctor Eugene Watson Burlingame, of the University of Pennsylvania, and will appear in his forthcoming *Dhammapada Commentary*.

It is a Buddhist custom to end an important section of Scripture with a kind of stichometry, giving the names and order of the Sūtras and even the number of the stanzas. This latter item is given in the Brethren's book, though omitted by the translatress. Curiously enough, the Sisters agree with her, and give us no such guarantee of textual integrity:

"With her two-finger consciousness,
That is no woman competent to gain!"¹⁴

The commentary explains:

"For women, from the age of seven or eight, boiling rice at all times, know not the moment when the rice is cooked, but must take some grains in a spoon and press it with two fingers; hence the expression 'two-finger sense.'" Mrs. Rhys Davids points out that the Italians have the same phrase to this day.

Well, the old redactor of the *Psalms of the Brethren*, when he comes to the final stichometry, after giving us the dry statistics, turns, in the twinkling of an eye, into a poet, and his stichometry takes fire:

"Sons of the Buddha, taintless, passionless,
With lion-voices ye have roared and gone,
Gone to the goal of calm, gone out, great fires!"

Blank verse is perhaps the best we can do for it, but the music of the Pali (in the words of Ruskin) "smites like the sound of the sea upon men's hearts for ever:"

Agikkhandhā va nibbutā!

Thus endeth the Book of the *Psalms of the Brethren*.

¹⁴ Psalms of the Sisters, p. 45.